DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 349 591 CS 507 913

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TITLE Twenty Years of Cultural Imperialism Research: Some Conceptual and Methodological Problems.
PUB DATE May 92
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (42nd, Miami, FL, May 20-25, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audiences; *Communication Research; Cross Cultural Studies; Cultural Interrelationships; *Culture Conflict; Developing Nations; Higher Education; *Ideology; *Imperialism; *Mass Media Effects; Political Power; *Research Problems
IDENTIFIERS *Cultural Hegemony; Jamaica; Third World

ABSTRACT

While the notion of "cultural imperialism" has received significant attention in communication studies since the early 1970s, researchers have ignored analyses of message systems and audience cultivation in favor of institutional analysis. Likewise, researchers have concentrated on the technologies, media products and processes of Western exporting countries with little concomitant concern for importing countries. These biases stem from a mechanistic model of social processes along with a non-symbolic, materialist conception of culture, viewed as synonymous with technologies, ideologies, or commodities. Previous critics have also failed to question the radicalism of scholars who would preserve the Third World cultures from Western encroachment. Furthermore, the cultural imperialism paradigm presents some serious problems in terms of data measurement and research design models. In brief, the cultural imperialism model, while yielding extensive and often useful analyses, so far has explicated little on the specifically cultural dimensions of relations between nations or between media and their audiences. An examination of popular music in one Third World country, Jamaica, shows how human creativity, exercised even by politically powerless people, can wreak havoc with facile assumptions held by proponents and opponents of imperialism. The current debate revolves largely around moral questions, and unless significant methodological shifts occur, this debate is unlikely to be settled on an empirical basis. (Sixty references are attached.) (HB)

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TWENTY YEARS OF CULTURAL IMPERIALISM RESEARCH: SOME CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

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Abstract

While the notion of "cultural imperialism" has received significant attention in communication studies since the early 1970s, researchers have ignored analyses of message systems and audience cultivation in favor of institutional analysis. Likewise, they have concentrated on the technologies, media products and processes of Western exporting countries with little concomitant concern for importing societies. These biases stem from a mechanistic model of social processes along with a non-symbolic, materialist conception of culture, viewed as synonymous with technologies, ideologies or commodities. The current debate revolves largely around moral questions and, unless significant methodological shifts occur, is unlikely to be settled on an empirical basis.

TWENTY YEARS OF CULTURAL IMPERIALISM RESEARCH: SOME CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

"Cultural imperialism" has received significant attention in communication studies since the early 1970s. The literature is replete with charges of global media industries, especially those of the United States, flooding Third World nations with "Western" culture. Studies have traced imperialism in domains as diverse as science and comics. Underlying these studies is the assumption that the Western media — characterized primarily as purveyors of gratuitous violence, pornography, stereotypical portrayals and authoritarianism — carry more antisocial messages than indigenous genres.

Although the term *cultural imperialism* is not always employed by the writers being reviewed here, it is used throughout this paper because it is either interchangeable with or inclusive of such alternative formations as *media imperialism*, *cultural domination*, or *electronic colonialism*. The term first appeared as a political slogan before systematic attempts were made to study the phenomenon. Some of the earliest references appeared in Silber (1970), an anthology of 92 papers from an international congress of writers and artists held two years earlier in Havana. Its emergence in communication studies was signalled by the nearly simultaneous publication in the early 1970s of Acosta *et al* (Lima), Wilsson (Stockholm), "L'Imperialisme culture" (Paris) and two consecutive issues of the *Journal of Communications* (Philadelphia) highlighting the subject. The growth of interest, at least among critical scholars, can be approximated by measuring the number of entries in *Marxism and the Mass Media*; this bibliography between 1972 and 1976 devoted 21 percent of all entries to the topic.

Cultural imperialism exponents may be divided into two groups on the basis of epistemology, intellectual influences and specific conceptualization of imperialism, one Anglo-American, the other composed of Latin Americanists and Continental Europeanists.

The first group views imperialism as a policy adopted consciously by the military-industrial complex to further or preserve the hegemony of Western states. Scholars like Smith, McPhail and Tunstall have drawn on an eclectic mix of inspirations, from mass culture theories in sociology to dependency theories in economics. For them, cultural imperialism is less a structural feature of a global system than it is an issue in an on-going debate between the West and the Third World. Their role, as they conceive it, is to fairly and cogently present the Third World view primarily to Western audiences. But they are hermeneutical also in their greater reliance on the logic and elegance of arguments to persuade readers than on quantitative representations of global processes.

On the other hand, Latin Americanists and Europeanists — Mattelart, Fejes, Nordenstreng, Varis, Salinas and Paldan, and Sarti — generally situate themselves within a Marxist tradition, specifically a non-structuralist neo-Marxism, committed to examining the media in the context of class conflicts as well as in relationship to national and global systems. They tend to view imperialism as a stage in the development of capitalism. They are empiricists in that their arguments are usually substantiated by references to processes in the real world, regarded as measurable and knowable.

Schiller — the scholar most responsible for popularizing the cultural imperialism thesis in the United States, and perhaps in the entire English-speaking world — falls somewhere between the two traditions, although tending toward the Anglo-American. He has focused on the structure and operation of the media, particularly production and distribution of power, within national systems and the global context (1983, pp. 249, 253; 1981). In his most explicit work on cultural imperialism (1976), he defined the notion as "the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system" (p. 9). He has cited the exportation of tourists, business culture, commercial broadcasting, work-force segmentation, and scientific research as examples of the one-way transmission of cultural-informational outputs,

facilitated by computer networks and satellites as well as public diplomacy, particularly the free flow of information doctrine.

More typical of the Anglo-American tradition, Tunstall (1977) offered at best critical support for the cultural imperialism notion. He accused Schiller of both underestimating the strength of American television (for failing to acknowledge competing imperialisms) *and* exaggerating its strength (by using unreliable figures and failing to acknowledge the importance of film). "Schiller attributes too many of the world's ills to television. He also has an unrealistic view of returning to cultures many of which although authentic are also dead. In my view a non-American way out of the media box is difficult to discover because it is an American, or Anglo-American, built box" (p. 63).

Smith (1980) viewed the cultural imperialism controversy as at heart a "delicate moral or philosophical conundrum" (p. 13), although he acknowledged that the vast mass media of the West have "transformed the social fabric of Third World countries as it has repressed its traditional cultures" (p. 13). The purpose of his essay, replete with brief case studies and various statistics, was "to describe the various lines along which the controversy has been growing and point out some possible future points of synthesis or agreement" (p. 16).

McPhail (1981) presented a cogent summary of the New World Information Order debate as presented in UNESCO, particularly as concerns press control, freedom, direct broadcast satellites, communication policies, and development journalism. In research design and conceptualization, both McPhail and Smith reflect the conditioning influence of Schiller and Turnstall. In addition, Anglo-American researchers are anchored in what Boyd-Barrett (1977, p. 176) called a neo-Weberianism, characterized by a view of society as driven by conflicts between competing interest groups.

A distinguishing characteristic of Latin American and Continental European scholars is the primacy given to class and other cleavages within each society. Varis and Nordenstreng were also among the first to recognize, at the theoretical level at least, the "nonhomogeniety of the nation state" (1973). They (along with Guback) have been the most systematic in research design of all cultural imperialism exponents.

Of the non-Anglo scholars, Mattelart is probably the most prodigious and eclectic. His production spans a remarkable range of methods and subjects, from content analyses within the hermeneutical tradition (1980; Dorfman and Mattelart, 1984) through structuralist analyses of media production (1979, 1983a) to theoretical contributions (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1979, 1983; Mattelart, 1983).

Like Varis and Nordenstreng, Mattelart acknowledges the possibility of varied, even contradictory, interpretations by media audiences. "The process of transnationalization can only be understood in a complex correlation of national and international or even local and regional forces, crisscrossed by the existence of resistance, adoption, recuperation, offensives, and mimicry" (1983, p. 17).

This theoretical insight holds some important epistemological consequences, which may be demonstrated by contrasting studies of Chile during the Allende period by Mattelart on the one hand and Schiller on the other. While Schiller (1972) was heralding nationalization of the major media as marking "the end of cultural colonialism," Mattelart (1973, 1980) was pointing to the persistency of "bourgeois" genres and control of media product distribution as centers of capitalist power untouched by the government takeovers. However, intranational cleavages are only sporadically captured by the research designs of cultural imperialism theorists, including Mattelart, Varis and Nordenstreng.

Notwithstanding the regional and individual differences among researchers suggested above, the cultural imperialism literature evidences several methodological and conceptual similarities. Discussed in this paper are shared research designs, conceptualizations of *imperialism* and *culture* along with an implicit model of humanity, differentially applied to major social actors.

Several of these issues have been discussed by Boyd-Barrett (1977), Fejes (1982), Golding (1977), C. Lee (1980), Salins and Paldan (1979) and Sarti (1981). In contrast to previous evaluations, this paper attempts a review of the cultural imperialism literature that is more holistic and critical. For example, both the culture concept and the issue of research design receive more attention here. Moreover, it is argued that the notion of imperialism, which previous reviews have generally tried to refine, must be rejected as fundamentally unsuitable for cultural analysis.

While retaining a commitment to empiricism, this review goes further to critique the mechanistic model of social processes held by the cultural imperialism exponents and many of their critics. That paradigm, dominant in communication studies, involves "an assumption that human social behavior can be adequately explained in terms of independent, environmentally-isolated, discrete causal chains" (Thomas: 431). The model roots itself in a dualism which tends to constitute separate "subject" and "object" in each process. Each party — seen as encapsulated in a distinct social universe — is then constituted as a mirror image of the other. Some of the antipodean pairs which undergird these studies include: modern/traditional, external/internal, capitalist/pre-capitalist, and Western/indigenous. These pairings, often helpful for initially organizing data, too often become essentialized at the level of theory.

Finally, this paper rejects the current moral/political cast of the debate. Alignments tend to follow pre-existing battlelines, between scholars labeled variously as radical, critical or prophetic and those viewed as liberal, administrative or priestly (Lazarsfeld, 1941, p. 24 and Carey, 1983). But these alignments, understandable in the context of American social and cultural studies in which they were germinated, have been reified and extended to other terrains, where they often hinder analysis.

Previous reviews have failed to question, for example, the "radicalism" of scholars who would preserve Third World cultures from Western encroachment. It is argued here instead that cultural imperialism exponents could be more aptly described as conservatives since they stand *against* a process of social change: the apparent homogenization of culture. Furthermore, these scholars — repeatedly presented by themselves and their critics alike as defenders of Third World sovereignty — routinely portray "traditional" cultures as unimportant, unanalyzed backdrops against which are played out the real dramas involving modern, technological and commodified media. Although cultural imperialism implies a relationship involving two or more cultures, these researchers analyze only the modern, Euro-American side. Ironically then, those scholars most vociferous in their defense of Third World audiences often present the subjects of their analysis as passive, uncritical recipients of culture, a not particularly human portrayal.

In brief, the cultural imperialism notion — while yielding extensive and useful institutional analyses — so far has explicated little on the specifically *cultural* dimensions of relations between nations or between media and their audiences. While often couched in practical policy terms, the debate as currently framed is at root a moral one and is unlikely to be settled on an empirical basis.

Problems of Data Measurement and Research Design

Although exponents of the cultural imperialism thesis rarely make their methodological scaffoldings explicit, they generally profess a commitment to empiricism, if not in a strict Popperian concern with hypothesis testing then certainly in a minimum commitment to using verifiable data to support or refute a general argument. For example, Schiller defined the "central focus" of his 1981 book as showing "what is actually and verifiably changing in the informational condition of American society" (p. xii) and, in a brief methodological note, apologized that his data had been outstripped by technological and organizational changes (p. xviii). Similarly, Mattelart in an outline of communication research and policy priorities in France called for the development of information on information. "With regard to the press, there has yet to be set in motion a statistical apparatus that would enable the collection of information on the material functioning of the media. ... Concerted action must therefore be launched with a view toward undertaking long-term statistical observation, as an essential base for more qualitative research" (1983, p. 65).

Despite these and other empiricist assertions, there exists a profound incongruity between the cultural imperialism hypothesis and the type of evidence sought (and submitted) in support of it. This stems from a lack of systematic attention to issues of design, measurement and data collection. Due to this neglect of methodology, most claims of cultural imperialism are exercises in interpretation, a point already forcefully made by Pool (1980) and reiterated by Blumler (1983).

One fundamental measurement problem stems from the units of analysis employed. While these studies expressly name *culture* as the unit of concern, many confuse this with the nation on the one hand and civilization on the other. There is

little recognition of the various cultural cleavages (i.e. ethnic, gender, class) glossed by *nation* in the Third World context or by *civilization* in the Western world. Thus, culture — the unit of analysis named in these studies — ends up at variance with the units actually employed (i.e. the nation or civilization).

A similar problem exists concerning the dependent variable which in many of these studies is cast as the negative effects of media exports. However, these effects are measured sometimes by recourse to the findings of systematic studies (Guback and Varis, 1982; ; Mattelart, 1979, p. 51; Mattelart, 1983, pp. 47-51; , Nordengstreng and Varis, 1974; Schiller, 1969, pp. 85-90; Schiller, 1986, pp. 105-116; Smith, 1980, pp. 91-93; Varis, 1974; Varis, 1985), and at other times by citing the proclamations of government officials or international organizations (Dinh, 1979; Guback and Varis, 1982, pp. 3; Mattelart, 1979, pp. 84-85, 94-97; Mattelart, 1983, pp. 11-12, 19-26, 129-138; McPhail, 1981; Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974, p. 3; Salina and Palden, 1979, pp. 95, 97; Sauvant, 1979; Schiller, 1969, p. 121; Schiller, 1973, p. 8; Schiller, 1986, pp. 60-61, 77; Smith, 1980, pp. 29). The latter means of supporting arguments is particularly problematic when researchers cite as evidence international proclamations which they themselves have helped to prepare (Dinh, 1979, p. 261; Nordenstreng, 1985, p. 632, n. 1; and Sarti, 1981, p. 323, n. 3). This self-referentialism undermines the reliability and validity of these studies and their empirical pretensions.

More problematic still is the matter of research design. The notion of cultural imperialism posits a hierarchical arrangement of cultural units, a relationship in which one is determinant and the others are dependent (Boyd-Barrett, 1977, p. 117; Fejes, 1982, p. 345; Golding, 1977, p. 291; Guback and Varis, 1982, p. 3; McPhail, 1981, p. 20; Salina and Paldan, 1979, pp. 87-90; Smith, 1980, pp. 43, 46). This means that substantiation of the argument can only be done by the systematic examination of cultural processes and artifacts in two or more societies. Instead, one finds the emphasis placed decidedly on the technologies, media products and processes of Western exporting countries with little concomitant concern for importing societies.

A related design shortcoming stems from a concentration on certain social communication processes at the expense of others. Communication processes,

following Gerbner's schema (1977, p. 200), can be divided into three categories: institutions, message systems and cultivation. "How mass media relate to other institutions, make decisions, compose message systems, and perform their functions in society are questions for institutional policy analysis. How large bodies of messages can be observed as dynamic systems with symbolic functions that have social consequences is the question of message system analysis. What common assumptions, points of view, images, and associations do the message systems tend to cultivate in large and heterogeneous communities, and with what public policy implications, are problems for cultivation analysis." Cultural imperialism studies tend to ignore message systems and cultivation analyses. This is not surprising since, as noted earlier, their designs usually ignore media-importing countries, the site where audiences are cultivated.

A possible resolution of these design problems is offered by Gillespie (pp. 14-18) who outlined two fruitful approaches to cross-cultural studies. The first approach, the cross-sectional study, examines the attributes of systems and their conditions across boundaries during a given period. The other type, the longitudinal or configurative study, analyzes two or more systems through time and then compares the resulting longitudinal data.

Although at first glance most cultural imperialism studies — especially those of Schiller, Mattelart, Smith and Tunstall — may seem longitudinal in design, a deeper analysis reveals that they fit into neither category. The notion of cultural imperialism implies two poles within a system, but analysts usually gather evidence from within the state(s) viewed as hegemonic, breaking what is implied to be a unified whole and studying only one half of the system. What results is as metaphysical as the sound of one hand clapping.

Given the centrality of temporal organization to the longitudinal approach, one would expect a deep knowledge of historical processes and a sensitivity to historical methods on the part of researchers using that design. However, a major weakness of this literature is the absence of any method, that is a consistent approach to the collection and use of data. Anecdotes that support the thesis are introduced while counter-evidence is overlooked or excluded from consideration. Furthermore, these studies tend to concentrate on recent (and short) periods, which

may account in part for the alarm with which many researchers view international cultural transmissions. Such shorttime frames may be sufficient for measuring dramatic social shifts but are often too short to capture changes in culture which, in contrast to the political and economic domains, inherently involves arational, routinized, often unconscious behavior or manipulation of symbols repeated over long periods. It is precisely this long term patterning that provides continuity and predictability to social life, even in the face of rapid political and economic shifts.

Cross-sectional studies tend to be more systematic since the same commodities are traced in their flow from one country or region to others (i.e. television programs and radio sets in Guback and Varis, 1982; Varis, 1974; Varis, 1985; Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974). The products chosen for study are usually multi-dimensional — economic, political and cultural. What is problematic is that researchers study only the purely economic aspects of these products yet continue to infer broader cultural ramifications. Lost in these studies is the recognition that while the commodity aspect of television programs may remain the same wherever they are traded, their cultural meanings do not. The variability and plasticity of meaning is a major source of problems in these studies, as noted by Tracey (p. 45). Thus, the validity of these studies as measures of specifically *cultural* imperialism is highly questionable.

A related design problem, central to both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies yet left unaddressed in both is the comparability of the measures chosen. Media programs and technologies are assumed to have uniform effects. Analysts tend to hold the meanings assigned to symbols by their culture to be universal and self-evident, making little effort to discover the varied affective and cognitive structures of the cultures into which media artifacts enter. There is little recognition of the variety of possible interpretations — divergent from the "intended" — that result when artifacts are viewed by people in cultures other than those from which they originated or by antagonistic social groups within a given culture. Thus, the measures used in cultural imperialism studies are plagued by problems of non-comparability along with the validity and reliability difficulties noted earlier.

Two Views of Imperialism

Of the two concepts central to the cultural imperialism thesis, imperialism has received the most critical attention. Tracey rejected the cultural imperialism charge because of an absence of data, yet he went on to propose that the "thesis be stood on its head, and to suggest instead an analysis, not of exploitation, but of service — of the proffering of cultural imagery that is absorbed by more deep-seated cultural strata" (1985, pp. 18, 29, 33). Not only is his alternative explanation premature (given the lack of evidence), but it also risks an abandonment of empirical grounding in favor of a speculative subjectivism.

Both Golding (1977) and Boyd-Barrett (1977) called for the conceptualization of cultural imperialism as distinct from imperialism on the one hand and media imperialism on the other. Boyd-Barrett in particular saw cultural imperialism as generated particularly by the media and schools. His major theoretical contribution was a call for the degree of intentionality to be employed as a means of distinguishing various modes of influence. Following Golding and Boyd-Barrett, scholars have shifted from the original concern with cultural imperialism to the narrower media variant, although the shift in label is not always accompanied by a shift in conceptualization.

Building upon Boyd-Barrett's concern with intentionality, P.S. Lee (1988, pp. 69-70) distinguished *communication imperialism*, which involves an active role by the dominating country, from *communication dependency*, which may be neither deleterious nor intentional, the latter being further divided "between 'involuntary dependency' in which the peripheral country has no choice in not relying on the metropolitan country and 'voluntary dependency' in which the peripheral country can dissociate from the metropolitan country but chooses to rely on it" (1988, pp. 69-70).

These critiques, although insightful, often stop at refining imperialism, however, the concept's political-economic origin makes problematic its transference to cultural analysis. To be employed in the cultural domain, the term must undergo a double conversion. While in the political-economic sense it implies exploitation, in the cultural sense it involves an imploitation, from the superordinate society to

that which is subordinate. Secondly, the former use involves a transfer of wealth — whether defined as profits, surplus value or loot — while the latter involves a transfer of values, ideas, standards, etc. The resulting clash, between the connotation of the term and its denotation in these works, is a source of much confusion. Attempts at readjusting imperialism should be abandoned, it is argued here, with "interplay," "interaction," or some similarly neutral construction being used instead since the term is inapplicable to the more fluid processes of cultural reproduction.

As noted earlier, imperialism tends to be conceptualized in two distinct ways in this literature. The more traditional Marxist conception views imperialism as a stage in the development of capitalism characterized by concentration and centralization of media industries coupled with a drive for ever-expanding markets. These processes are seen as unfolding on a world scale and as resulting inevitably from a logic internal to capitalism as a system of production. Imperial impulses, emerging from the corporate/economic realm, are facilitated or blocked at a secondary stage by political forces (i.e. governments or political movements). This schema is evident mainly in the works of Latin American and continental European researchers (i.e. Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1979, 1983; Palinas and Paldan; Sarti; see also Guback and Varis, 1982, p. 71).

In theory, the primary unit of analysis is class as manifested in social conflicts, especially struggles to control the means of production. In practice, however, analysts tend to focus on the actions of the capitalist class only. Capitalists are pictured as organized and operating on a trans-national basis while other classes are marginal to historical processes and invisible. Mattelart is an exception in this regard, having written rather extensively on anti-systemic movements in Chile, Mozambique and France (1973, 1980, 1983a).

Another conceptualization, this one typical of Anglo-American researchers, sees imperialism as a policy adopted more consciously by political and economic forces working in unison (Boyd-Barrett, 1977, p. 117; Golding, 1977, p. 291; Lee, 1980, p. 68; Schiller, 1976, p. 9; Smith, 1980, p. 43; McPhail, 1981, p. 20 and Turnstall, 1977). Although class and other cleavages are acknowledged, the

primary units of analysis tends to be nation-states, with analysis focusing largely on the actions of the hegemonic nation(s).

The emphasis given to nation-states is traceable to the influence of UNESCO and other international organizations in shaping these studies. Starting from assumptions of equality among states, researchers go on to discover — and denounce — vast international inequalities. However, given their notions of states as sui generis, they turn for resolution of these inequalities to the nation-states (and the superstructure of laws and organizations which rest upon them).The nation-state is portrayed in these works as sovereign, the instrument of ultimate control over a particular territory. It is also expected to represent the dominant, internal political forces. These assumptions are drawn largely from early Western political theory. But even during the times of Machiavelli, Hobbes and other classical theorists, the concept had limited applicability, given a world of empires and subordinated principalities. It applies even less to Third World states (products of colonialism) in this age of the World Bank and Rapid Deployment Forces. The influence of economic-dependency theories on this tradition, although often implicit and unacknowledged by the scholars themselves, has been well-documented in several critical summaries (Fejes, 1982; C. Lee, 1980; Salina and Paldon, 1979; and Sarti, 1981). Unlike the Marxist schema, however, this one draws on an eclectic mix of inspirations. For example, Schiller (1969) endorses positions as diverse as Franz Fanon, Lin Piao, Buckminister Fuller and Paul Sweezy, their one commonality being their criticism of the Western social order.

Within this literature, imperialism is portrayed as having two contradictory objectives. The first, assimilation, involves the imposition of one national or class standard on all. This logically requires the uniform exposure of powerful and powerless nations or social groups to the same pool of messages. The second objective, dependency, involves the preservation of a demarcation so that members of the subaltern group will know and keep their inferior place. This requires two sets of media with sharply different contents, one for the dominant and the other for the dominated nation or social group. Where assimilation requires exposure to one culture (even though spread beyond the boundaries of one nation) with the promise of inclusion once the codes and conventions are mastered, dependency suggests the

reproduction of two sets of values and standards (even within one society) locked indefinitely in a relationship of inherent inequality.

Strangely enough, many exponents of the cultural imperialism thesis use evidence of cultural homogenization to argue that dependency, which implies a double-standard, is being furthered or preserved (Boyd-Barrett, 1977, p. 128, compare with 132; Fejes, 1982, pp. 345-346; Golding, 1977, pp. 292, 295, 297; McPhail, 1981, p. 20; Smith, 1980, p. 43). Usually, the global circulation of television programs and other cultural materials is cited as evidence of dependency values being fostered. But, as Tunstall (p. 40) has noted, this involves faulty logic. "They complain that in the poor countries only the very rich can buy television anyhow, and then they see television as subverting the whole nation." Thus, the alleged pyramid of oppression — with Westerners at the top, Third World rulers in the middle and Third World people at the bottom — ends up suspended in mid-air, without an empirical or a demographic foundation.

An Implicit Model of Humanity

Implicit in the cultural imperialism literature is a three-tiered schema, along which are distributed intelligence, morality and agency in history . At one end are the "oppressed" who lack both initiative and virtue (except that which comes from suffering). They are victims, reduced largely to reacting, a criticism voiced earlier by Tracey (1985). This view of a victimized Third World is evident in Schiller's definition of cultural imperialism, cited earlier, as involving processes by which Third World rulers are "attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system" (1976, p. 9; See also Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974, p. 3; Smith, 1980, p. 43). Salina and Paldan even characterize the oppressed as having a "poverty of culture" (1979, p. 91).

This vision of Third World passivity leads to a deep pessimism, suggested in the claim from Schiller (1971, p. 110) that "in modern mass communications hard and inflexible laws, economic and technological operate. If these are not taken into account in the beginning, and at least partially overcome, courses of

development automatically unfold that soon become unquestioned 'natural' patterns." In a more recent work Schiller acknowledged that his emphasis on the structure and operation of the electronic media could lead to an overestimation of the power of the transnational and national business system surveyed." But his two-paragraph plea for readers to remain optimistic is all but drowned out by the image of corporate invincibility which effuses the rest of his work (1981, p. xvii).

At the other end of this schema are the capitalists. The owners and managers of transnational media corporations — while portrayed as malevolent — emerge as intelligent and exercising historical agency. By relying almost exclusively on data by or about corporations, critical scholars unconsciously adopt a corporatist view of the world while consciously opposing specific corporate goals.

Between these poles are prophetic scholars and international organizations (Dinh, 1979; Guback and Varis, 1982, p. 3; McPhail, 1981; Nordenstreng and Varis, 1985, p. 3; Salina and Paldan, 1979, pp. 95, 97; Schiller, 1986, p. 61; Smith, 1980, pp. 13-14), organizations with which many radical scholars have enjoyed symbiotic relationships (Dinh, p. 261; Guback and Varis, p. 3; Nordenstreng, 1985, p. 632, n. 1; Sarti, p. 323, n. 3; and Sauvant, p. 9). However, this neutral characterization of international organizations contradicts a political premise of many cultural imperialism studies since these organizations represent the very governments and classes often accused by these scholars of fostering international relations of dependency. More importantly, this characterization contradicts the stated epistemology of these scholars, many of whom have denounced neutrality as a sham if not an impossibility.

Culture: Non-symbolic, Utilitarian and Material

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the cultural imperialism notion lies in the failure of its exponents to rigorously conceptualize culture. For example, a two-volume reader in critical communication studies (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1979, 1983) contains no definition of culture but expounds at length on mode of production, hegemony and commodities, all of which are treated as key concepts in the field. Many scholars, including several exponents of the cultural-imperialism

thesis, have already identified the culture concept as its major weak point (Boyd-Barrett, 1977, p. 132; Fejes, 1982, p. 351; Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983, p. 24; Salinas and Paldan, 1979, p. 85; and Sarti, 1981, pp. 324-328). However, their critiques often stopped at admitting this weakness without offering any resolution.

Schlesinger (1987) has tackled the theoretical impasse in this area and provided some basis for advances with his actionist, meaning-constructing conception of cultural identity. "The national culture is a repository, *inter alia*, of classificatory systems. It allows 'us' to define ourselves against 'them' understood as those beyond the boundaries of the nation. It may also reproduce distinctions between 'us' and 'them' at the intra-national level, in line with the internal structure of social divisions and relations of power and domination" (p. 261).

Schlesinger shares — with those whom he criticizes — the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis. Moreover, his critique ranges wide over national identity studies in communication, political science and sociology but only skims the cultural imperialism literature. That literature, it is argued here, conflates culture with technology (Schiller, 1969, 1976, 1986; Mattelart, 1979, 1980, 1983), ideology (Fejes, 1982, p. 51; Golding, 1977; Sarti, 1981, p. 328; Smith, 1980, p. 43) or commodities (Guback and Varis, 1982; Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974; Varis, 1974; Varis, 1985), a point missed by Schlesinger.

This conflation is due to the mechanistic concept of culture found in these studies, one which posits a linear relationship between culture and other domains. It emphasizes the non-symbolic, material aspects of culture, especially technology. By ignoring the symbolic content of culture, these scholars end up ignoring variances in meaning, between and within cultures. This leads to a view of all aspects of culture (or at least those worth studying) as rational and useful. This narrow reading of culture is reinforced by the political-economic focus of many of these studies. This view of culture dates to the nineteenth century. Its retention among exponents of cultural imperialism stems from a tendency among these scholars to seek conceptual validation from the writings of early Marxists (See V.I. Lenin, "National culture," in Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1979, pp. 100-102). These classic works, given the era in which they were written, are imbued with a pre-Boasian view of culture that emphasizes non-symbolic components.

As a result of this conceptualization, cultural artifacts (and whole cultures) are often portrayed as pure, ideal constructs floating unchanged through history. Furthermore, the articulation of cultures assumes a linear relationship between culture, language and nation, if not with race. Missing from this literature is the realization that the cultural contacts being described have been under way for hundred of years and have resulted in many pidgin languages, Creole musics and syncretic religions now strung across the globe, from New Orleans to New Delhi.

This linearity and essentialism is evident in C. Lee's claim (p. 68) that the media foster "the invasion of capitalistic worldviews and infringement upon the indigenous way of life in the recipient nations;" or McPhail's explanation (p. 20) of electronic colonialism as resulting from the importation of "foreign-produced software, along with engineers, technicians, and related information protocols, that vicariously establish a set of foreign norms, values and expectations which, in varying degrees, may alter the domestic cultures and socialization processes;" or in the general contrasting of Western culture to authentic indigenous cultures, especially those of the Third World (Schiller, 1973; Smith, 1980, p. 13). It may be possible to speak in such bonded terms about commodities, machinery and money, but less meaningful when applied to the more fluid realm of codes, conventions and values.

Assumptions of dualism and bondedness undergird discussions of sub-national cultures as well. Each class or other sub-group is seen as possessing a distinct, logically coherent set of values, ideas and standards. Furthermore, each sub-culture is assumed to be produced and consumed by members of the sub-group only. Thus, contradictory elements of this culture (or at least those elements which the analysts define as being against the group's interests) are attributed to "penetration" or "contamination" by outsiders (Salinas and Paldan, 1979, p. 92; Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1979, p. 44).

Also evident in these works is a rationalist and utilitarian view of culture (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983, p. 13; Mattelart, 1983, p. 9). Lee explicitly rejects economism, yet goes on to argue (p. 55) that what Third World countries need "is the freedom to choose any appropriate synthesis of media models and alternatives as long as it is fair and *beneficial* to their national development goals" (emphasis

added). This view of culture, as something chosen according to rational criteria, is one shared by those whom he criticizes.

In a more extreme form, utilitarianism contributes to the reduction of culture only to its material, technological aspects. This is characteristic, for example, of Schiller's studies which ignore all culture but that transmitted by the technologically sophisticated media. Mattelart criticized this trend (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983, p. 19), but his own *Multinational Corporations and the Control of Culture* focuses narrowly on the production, distribution and ownership of material products. He ignores the specifically cultural domain, except for a chapter on the Children's Television Workshop and its "Sesame Street" series. The book does not explicate "the control of culture" as promised by its title. If anything, it illuminates the control of media technology.

As for the structure of the cultural order, these works portray it as a direct replica of the economic world. It is assumed that power operates similarly in both domains and that those who are powerful in one realm automatically hold power in the other. Ignored are the sweeping cultural changes that have been repeatedly wrought by those who do not control the major means of communications (i.e. the U.S. counter-culture movement of the 1960s, the Rastafarians in the Caribbean and the Islamic fundamentalists in Iran).

Without systematic comparisons, it is impossible to test the type of comparative claims inherent in the notion of imperialism regarding message systems (i.e. Artifacts of Culture A are more violent, etc. than Culture B) and cultivation (i.e. exports of Culture A have contributed to Culture B becoming more violent, etc.). In the absence of systematic procedures for distinguishing endogenous cultural processes from exogenous ones, scholars merely assume that undesirable cultural shifts have resulted from the introduction of outside elements. Little allowance is made for the possible conversion of "pollens" into "honey."

Recognition of cultural transmutation requires a willingness to forgo the assumption of imperialism as well as a receptivity to an alternative conception of culture as "ritual"(Carey, 1989, p. 18). Ingredients of this alternative view exists in Schlesinger's activist, meaning-constructing conception of cultural identity, minus his assumption of the nation-state as the determinant shaping context for culture.

Also important is Hall's emphasis on meaning systems. "There are many different 'logics' within any one society — though there are also relations of power and dominance between them. Different groups in the society make use of different ideologies to make their social existence, interests and practices intelligible. There is a constant struggle as to which 'regime' forms the main source of social conception" (1985, p. 270).

A Case Study: "Jamaican" Reggae

Cultural imperialism exponents often cite evidence drawn, ironically, from television, print media, wire services and other means of elite-culture reproduction to substantiate their claims. To refute the thesis, critics have pointed to the popularity of indigenous Third World television programs or of American Westerns and feature films among videocassette-recorder owners in Saudi Arabia and Turkey, as evidence of viewers' preference prevailing over producers' dictates (Ogan, 1988; Tracey, 1985). However, both sides of the debate are biased toward the same relatively elite culture and technologically sophisticated media.

Much more appropriate for testing the cultural imperialism notion is popular music, which reaches larger audiences — through radio, audio tape players, and other truly mass media. An examination of popular music in one Third World country, Jamaica, should suffice to show how human creativity, exercised even by political powerless people, can wreak havoc with facile assumptions held by proponents and opponents of imperialism.

For the first half of this century, the most popular musical genre in Jamaica was mento, a dance music featuring a square 4/4 beat with witty, often risque lyrics. Just as mento was scoring critical and commercial success in the United States in the late 1950s, through the efforts mainly of Harry Belafonte, it was being displaced within Jamaica by jazz, boogie-woogie and other imported genres. As Jamaican musicians played these newly popular forms, they drew unavoidably upon mento and other local antecedents. The result was not the triumph of foreign musics, as posited in the cultural imperialism literature. Instead, the "foreign" boogie-woogie and "local" mento came to be fused into something new — ska,

named for the sound produced by the deadened rhythm guitar strokes on the off beat. In turn, ska came to form a crucial centerpiece of the then-evolving British counter-culture. Its impact on Western music can be heard in the Beatles' 1968 tune "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da," to cite just one example.

By the mid-1960s, however, ska had yielded its place at the top of the Jamaican charts to rock steady, a style which featured a slower looping rhythm, said to have been influenced by the soundtracks of American Western movies, by then a major form of urban entertainment. This new music and an accompanying dance style soon wound their way to American and European dance floors via returning tourists. In 1971 alone, two major American pop stars — Aretha Franklin and Paul Simon — recorded rock steady tunes, as less well known musicians like Johnny Nash carved out a niche for their almost exclusively rock steady repertoire.

While this trend was developing in the United States, rock steady was being pushed off the Jamaican air waves and pop charts by American soul music, of which Aretha Franklin, ironically, was a major exponent. Rock steady was also being undermined within Jamaica by a massive migration from the countryside brought burru, a hypnotic cult music that stresses polyrhythmic percussion, especially drumming, and is featured in the gatherings of syncretic religious sects.

It was as if popular music in Jamaica underwent a double religious conversion, washed once in the trance-inducing burru music, then baptized in the soul-stirring fires of American rhythm-and-blues. It was reborn in the slums of Jamaica sometime around 1969 (just as the cultural imperialism thesis was taking shape) as a new genre called Reggae. Its major exponents were mainly adherents to Rastafarianism, an amalgam of Christianity, traditional African religions and black nationalism. In the preceding ten years, Rastafarianism had gone from being a marginal cult to developing a mass following, mainly among dispossessed urban youth. Its seeds can be traced to the November, 1930, crowning of Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie I, formerly Ras (Prince) Tafari. The majesty of his coronation convinced a few Jamaicans that this man of color was Christ incarnate, who had come to lead New World blacks back to Africa and save the world from colonialism.

Confirming once again the non-linearity of cultural flows, reggae went in twenty short years from the Kingston slums to become a major international popular genre, played by such major rock stars as Eric Clapton and integrated into the youth countercultures of Africa, Europe and the United States. Just one reggae band — Bob Marley and the Wailers — played to audiences of 100,000 on nearly every continent and grossed over $240 million, until its leader's death in 1981. In Hawaii, the genre has fused with the local traditional music into a new form call "Jawaiian" while on the North American mainland a variant of reggae which involved disc jockeys extemporaneously rhyming over instrumental records was a constituent element in the development of rap (Bergman, 1985, p. 7; Berry, Foose and Jones, 1986, p. 235).

The history of reggae reveals three features which have characterized the evolution of other Third World popular idioms, even though it is set apart from the others by its greater international popularity. First of all, commercialized American popular idioms were integral to the creation of Third World dance musics. A second characteristic of these synthetic musics is their link to syncretic religions and Creole languages. Their emergence is evidence not merely of personal genius but also of shifts throughout entire cultural systems. Finally, all of these genres have transcended the narrow bonds of the era and societies in which they were forged. Like the novel, they have been adopted and adapted by people in circumstances far different from those of their creation. Their cross-cultural reproduction contradicts the essentialist assumptions held by many researchers in this area. In brief, the *cultural* relationship of the West and Third World is characterized by circularity, by a giving and taking at both ends that is often unconscious and unintended.

Just as imported musical genres were integral to the evolving Jamaican sounds of the 1950s and 1960s, so too Western technology was crucial to their popularization. Reggae would not have gained a mass audience, Jamaican musicians readily admit, without mobile amplification sound systems and multi-track recording studios. There is no evidence that the imported technology and the Fats Domino sounds were imposed upon Jamaicans. In fact, during the late 1950s Jamaican musicians would routinely pass up the light European classical and mainstream American popular offerings on local radio in favor of the big band

swing and highly syncopated R&B music that — when the weather permitted — came through from New Orleans stations. Since neither the Louisiana rhythms nor the sound equipment preferred by Jamaican musicians were locally available, these were acquired through expensive plane trips to Miami and beyond (Bergman, 1985, p. 22).

The rapid international popularization of reggae was due to more than the machination of corporate behemoths. The genre enjoys a double allure, especially among dispossessed urban youths, because of its hypnotic dance beat and its messianic promises. But credit in the first instance must go to those poor, marginalized Jamaican "rude boys" who, with remarkable genius and skill, wove together the strands of apparently irreconcilable idioms into a new, seamless whole.

It bears noting that the "Jamaican" antecedents of reggae — from burru to mento to ska to rock steady — all resulted from a similar fusion of earlier musics of various origins, notably African folk and American popular genres. Indeed, "American" music itself is a similar medley, including various African strains contributed by a people who were economically and politically subjugated. American popular culture, often identified narrowly with the nation from which it is currently exported, is the example par excellence of a world-historical process of Creolization. Its heterogeneity gives it an appeal which might explain its universal presence as much as any push for export profits. In short, American popular culture has not been the unambiguously destructive force that cultural imperialism exponents have assumed.

Conclusion

To summarize, the cultural imperialism literature is characterized by an uncritical acceptance of the political self-representations of scholars on both sides of the divide. The moral/political cast of the debate has served as a diversion, keeping attention away from fundamental issues of methodology and epistemology.

Much of the current literature presents a view of world-historical processes that is Eurocentric and romantic. This paternalism must be replaced with a consistent model of humanity, one that recognizes the potential capacity even of

powerless groups for historical agency, morality and intelligence. If it is accepted that the creation of culture is truly a phylogenic characteristic, then it should follow that the politically and economically disadvantaged may occasionally enjoy (by weight of their numbers) certain advantages in the cultural realm. That is why the reproduction of social patterns and values must be proven instead of being assumed.

Therein lies a major dilemma for researchers in this tradition, a choice between retaining the political "high ground" as protectors of the powerless on the one hand or, on the other, subjecting their thesis to testing, with unpredictable results. The systematic measurement of social patterns and their meanings — using truly mass cultural forms — is likely to severely undercut the claims of audience cultivation. Meanwhile, the continued absence of verifiable support for the thesis is likely to undermine its usefulness as a political battle cry as well as the implicit empiricist goals. Thus, after twenty years of research, cultural imperialism stands at a theoretical crossroad mired in methodological mud.

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